United Nations

Report of the Preparatory Committee for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations

General Assembly
Official Records • Forty-ninth Session
Supplement No.48 (A/49/48)

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I. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1. The Preparatory Committee for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations was established by the General Assembly in its decision 46/472 of 13 April 1992, which was adopted at the 84th plenary meeting of its forty-sixth session. By that decision, the Assembly also entrusted the Preparatory Committee, consisting of the members of the General Committee and open to the participation of all Member States, with the task of considering and recommending to the Assembly at its forty-seventh session proposals for suitable activities in connection with the observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, on the understanding that its decisions would be taken by consensus.

2. On 8 December 1992, the General Assembly considered the first report of the Preparatory Committee. 1/ In its decision 47/417 of 8 December 1992, the Assembly took note of the work of the Committee in 1992 and decided that the Preparatory Committee should continue its work and report to the Assembly at its forty-eighth session.

3. At that session, on 19 October 1993, the General Assembly considered the second report of the Preparatory Committee. 2/ In its decision 48/406 of the same date, the Assembly took note of the work of the Preparatory Committee in 1993, including the decision that the theme for the commemoration would be "We the Peoples of the United Nations ... United for a Better World", and that an open-ended drafting group would be established to prepare a declaration to be adopted in 1995 to mark the anniversary. Furthermore, the Assembly decided that the Preparatory Committee should continue its work and report thereon to the Assembly at its forty-ninth session. The present report is submitted in response to that decision.

4. Subsequently, the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee, in a letter dated 9 December 1993 addressed to the President of the General Assembly (A/48/749), requested that consideration be given to reopening the agenda item of the forty-eighth session of the Assembly relating to the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary in order to enable the Assembly to consider additional matters. As a result, the Assembly adopted, on 23 December 1993, resolution 48/215 A, in which it: (a) approved, on an exceptional basis, the creation of the post of Special Adviser, at the Under-Secretary-General level, against general temporary assistance resources for organizing and coordinating activities related to the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations; and (b) requested the Secretary-General to provide adequate secretariat support for the Preparatory Committee.

5. Since the adoption by the General Assembly of its decision 48/406, the Preparatory Committee has held 10 meetings: the 9th meeting on 11 January 1994, the 10th meeting on 15 February, the 11th meeting on 15 March, the 12th meeting on 19 April, the 13th meeting on 19 May, the 14th meeting on 14 June, the 15th meeting on 21 July, the 16th meeting on 15 September, the 17th meeting on 27 October and the 18th meeting on 2 November.

II. PREPARATIONS FOR THE COMMEMORATION OF THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY AND FOR THE DRAFTING OF A DECLARATION

A. Commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary

6. In paragraph 6 of its 1993 report, 2/ the Preparatory Committee noted that "a suitable climax to the fiftieth anniversary would need to be identified, which should have universal importance, be enduring in its effect and have a suitable symbolic value". During five of its meetings in 1994, the Committee considered the practical modalities for implementing this organizing principle. As a result of these deliberations, the Committee submitted to the General Assembly a document in which it recommended the adoption of a draft resolution. 3/ In adopting the resolution (resolution 48/215 B) on 26 May 1994, the Assembly decided to convene a special commemorative meeting of the Assembly on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Charter of the United Nations, to be held at United Nations Headquarters from 22 to 24 October 1995.

7. In the same resolution, the General Assembly also decided that invitations to the meeting would be issued to all Member and observer States at the level of head of State or Government, and that all heads of delegations would be afforded the opportunity to address the special meeting. The Secretary-General was entrusted with sending out the invitations requesting all heads of State or Government of Member and observer States to advise him, as soon as possible, of their participation and representation and of whether or not they proposed to address the meeting. The Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its forty-ninth session on replies received, in order to enable the Assembly to recommend a precise timetable and agenda for the meeting and a suggested timetable for the conduct of the general debate of the fiftieth session. The Secretary-General has issued invitations as requested and will report on the replies received as soon as the necessary information is available.

8. At the 18th meeting of the Preparatory Committee, on 2 November 1994, the Chairman made the following statement:

> "With regard to the issue still pending before the Committee, I have conducted extensive consultations and I propose to send a letter, in my capacity as the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations, to the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which would read as follows:
>
> '10 November 1994
>
> 'Dear Ambassador Al-Kidwa,
>
> 'With regard to your letter of 27 May 1994, I am pleased to confirm to you that the arrangements mentioned in General Assembly resolution 48/215 B of 26 May 1994 for the special commemorative meeting of the General Assembly on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, in addition to applying to all

Member and observer States, shall also apply to Palestine, in its capacity as observer.

'Please accept the assurances of my highest consideration.

'Ambassador Richard Butler AM
Chairman of the Preparatory Committee
for the Fiftieth Anniversary
of the United Nations'"

This proposal was adopted by the Committee without objection and it was thus agreed that the Chairman would forward the above letter to Ambassador Al-Kidwa.

It was further agreed that it would be appropriate for the Chairman to send a letter to the same effect to the other observers, if they so requested.

B. Drafting of a declaration

9. At its 4th meeting, the Preparatory Committee established an open-ended drafting group to prepare a solemn declaration to be adopted in 1995 to mark the observance of the anniversary. It was agreed that the declaration should reaffirm adherence by Member States to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and guide the Organization's work for the future. There were some differences of view on when the drafting group should begin its work. Following subsequent discussions, and on the recommendation of the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee, it was agreed that the work of the drafting group would take place in two phases: namely, consideration of conceptual issues and preparation of an outline; and more detailed drafting.

10. The drafting group of the Preparatory Committee has held eight meetings: the 1st meeting on 22 June 1993, the 2nd meeting on 17 February 1994, the 3rd meeting on 7 March, the 4th meeting on 24 March, the 5th meeting on 14 April, the 6th meeting on 12 May, the 7th meeting on 10 June and the 8th meeting on 23 June.

11. Following the 2nd meeting of the drafting group, the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee prepared a note (A/AC.240/1994/WG/1) in which it was indicated that during the discussions on the conceptual approach, consensus seemed to have emerged around five main points, namely that:

(a) The Declaration must address the ordinary people of all countries, a distinction must be drawn between people and bureaucracies and it must be clear in language;

(b) It must not be grandiose;

(c) It must have substance;

(d) It should be based on a thematic approach;

(e) The drafting group should prepare a document which reconciled brevity and substance and was driven by the need for ordinary people to understand and appreciate it, without being merely platitudinous.

It was also agreed that all decisions by the drafting group should be taken by consensus.

12. Following its consideration of the note at its 4th meeting, the drafting group further refined the conceptual basis of the declaration and requested a broad outline for the draft. The outline (A/AC.240/1994/WG/2), which the Chairman presented to the drafting group at its 5th meeting, suggested the following elements:

(a) Characterization of the event;

(b) Reaffirmation of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations;

(c) The need to implement the Charter in contemporary and anticipated circumstances: (i) peace; (ii) equality; (iii) justice; and (iv) development.

13. On the basis of the outline, which the Preparatory Committee accepted, and comments received from delegations, a detailed note on possible elements for inclusion in a draft declaration was prepared and considered by the drafting group (A/AC.240/1994/WG/3). On 31 May 1994, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries submitted a draft text entitled "Draft declaration to be adopted at the special commemorative meeting of the General Assembly on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations" (A/AC.240/1994/WG/4). At the 8th meeting of the drafting group, the Chairman reconfirmed the two decisions agreed to by the Committee at its previous meetings regarding the basic outline of the declaration and its structure, namely, that it should be clear and economical in size.

14. At the 18th meeting of the Preparatory Committee, it was agreed that the question of a draft declaration should be included on the agenda for future meetings of the Committee, pending resumption of meetings of the drafting group, which it was agreed would take place at the beginning of 1995.

III. OTHER SUBSTANTIVE MATTERS CONSIDERED BY THE COMMITTEE

A. Commemorative programmes and activities

15. At all its meetings in 1994, the Preparatory Committee has been brought up to date on the activities of the secretariat with regard to world-wide commemorative programme development for the fiftieth anniversary. This has enabled the Committee to consider the various programmes being planned or under way, and to provide the necessary guidance.

16. In the course of the consideration of possible commemorative programmes and activities, several members of the Preparatory Committee stressed the need to accord the highest priority to reaching youth. In that context, the Chairman of the Committee undertook to indicate, at the appropriate stage, to the President of the General Assembly the need for the Assembly to take action on the convening of a youth plenary as part of the commemoration, in accordance with Assembly resolution 45/103 of 14 December 1990.

17. At the 13th meeting, the secretariat briefed the Preparatory Committee on programme development oriented towards children and youth. It was informed that plans were under way for a global "teach-in" on the United Nations, in which the objective was to have all school systems designate time around 24 October 1995 to teach about the United Nations. The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, expressed support for the proposed global "teach-in" project.

18. At the same meeting, the representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland proposed that the Preparatory Committee consider the creation of a United Nations fiftieth anniversary coin programme. At its 14th meeting, the Committee agreed that the issuance of legal-tender coins commemorating the fiftieth anniversary would be a fitting way for Member States to honour and provide a suitable lasting memento of this historic occasion and decided to recommend to the General Assembly that it adopt a resolution endorsing this programme (see para. 34 below, draft resolution I). Under the programme, participating Member States issuing coins honouring the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations would agree to donate a royalty to the Trust Fund for the Fiftieth Anniversary Celebrations on each special proof or uncirculated-condition coin sold to collectors. The Committee noted the intention of the secretariat to use the additional funds to support educational and communications activities about the work of the United Nations.

19. At its 14th meeting, the Preparatory Committee considered a conference room paper containing a comprehensive summary of global projects for the fiftieth anniversary. The projects covered key programme areas such as education and youth; publications; film and television programming; media campaigns; discussion series, symposia and scholarly initiatives; exhibits and public spaces; concerts and public events; and commemorative items. The projects were those being overseen and coordinated by the secretariat. Numerous additional national and/or local projects were being initiated by Member States through their national committees, or by United Nations associations and other non-governmental organizations.

20. The Committee was informed that the projects had been selected by the secretariat from the several hundred submitted and were those that best met the overall objectives of the fiftieth anniversary, as well as the project guidelines and criteria established by the secretariat. The list distinguished between projects currently being implemented and those in the development stage.

The first category included projects for which both funding and executing partners, whether private, governmental or non-governmental, had been identified. Those in the development stage largely included projects for which funding and/or executing partners still remained to be secured.

21. The Preparatory Committee was advised that since the General Assembly had not allocated resources for commemorative programmes and events, many of the projects under way were self-funded and thus reflected the availability of resources of the executing parties. The secretariat had also recently begun developing global programmes to be paid for out of funds raised for that purpose (see paras. 31 and 32 below). Some of the funds raised would also be used to make all projects more accessible, to the extent possible and appropriate, by translating them into the official languages of the United Nations and making resources available for distribution.

22. The Preparatory Committee was further informed that the secretariat was maintaining a master calendar of global and national events to the extent that such information became available.

B. Action by Member and observer States, including the establishment of national committees and the issuance of commemorative stamps

23. It will be recalled that the Secretary-General had requested, in his note verbale dated 3 February 1993 to all permanent representatives to the United Nations, the establishment of national committees to coordinate preparations for the fiftieth anniversary. The Preparatory Committee was pleased to note that, as of 3 November 1994, 79 Member or observer States had established national committees, while another 30 had indicated their intention to do so. The Member or observer States that had established national committees were as follows:

Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Bhutan, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Egypt, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guyana, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Italy, Jamaica, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Senegal, Singapore, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Thailand, Netherlands, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Yemen.

The countries that had indicated their intention to establish national committees were as follows:

Antigua and Barbuda, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belize, Bolivia, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guatemala, Haiti, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Kenya, Lebanon, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Panama, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Swaziland, Uganda, Uruguay and Yugoslavia.

The Committee expressed the hope that, in order to render this a truly global commemoration, additional Member States would give consideration to establishing national committees.

24. The Preparatory Committee was informed of the activities being planned by these committees, some examples of which include:

(a) Educational campaigns on the United Nations;

(b) Conferences on numerous themes, including the United Nations role as the "people's organization" and the impact of the United Nations on the international commercial environment and international security;

(c) Media - major television stations and newspapers are preparing special programmes and editions;

(d) The organization of essay competitions in schools, lectures, symposia and film shows to focus on the United Nations;

(e) Exhibitions on the activities of the United Nations;

(f) The creation of commemorative items.

25. Many Member States had also expressed interest in issuing commemorative stamps to mark the anniversary. The secretariat was working with the United Nations Postal Administration to develop a possible programme consisting of first day covers of the commemorative stamps on specially designed envelopes.

C. Activities within the United Nations system

26. In its 1993 report, 2/ the Preparatory Committee agreed that within the context of the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary, an extraordinary opportunity existed to highlight the mutually reinforcing goals of the United Nations and its sister organizations. The Committee expressed its continuing interest in that important aspect of the commemoration and requested that it be kept informed of further developments. Since 1993, coordination of the activities of the United Nations and other organizations of the United Nations system has continued to be ensured mainly through the Administrative Committee on Coordination and, at the working level, through focal points, representatives designated by specialized agencies and organizations of the United Nations for the fiftieth anniversary.

27. The Preparatory Committee was informed that since September 1993, three meetings had been held with the focal points. Discussions had focused primarily on joint communication strategies and outlining the major global achievements of the United Nations system, as well as on the development of appropriate collaboration in the world-wide commemorative programmes. The Committee was further informed that such partnerships were evolving in five projects. In addition, the United Nations field network and the regional commissions had been mobilized towards the commemorative effort.

28. The Preparatory Committee was advised that the Administrative Committee on Coordination, at its 1994 spring session at Geneva, had further considered these issues, including increasing system-wide participation in the fiftieth anniversary and consolidating the messages that the Organization would direct towards the general public during the critical year 1995. The Administrative

Committee had agreed that the fiftieth anniversary provided an opportunity to create a more balanced public image of the United Nations, encompassing not only the political and peace-keeping activities, but also the social and economic work of the Organization, and that the commemoration should consist of substantive activities aimed at educating the general public about the United Nations and building a more broad-based constituency for the Organization. The Administrative Committee had also decided to organize a special forum during its spring 1995 session to discuss the future of the United Nations system in the context of the anniversary.

29. The Preparatory Committee was also informed of the efforts being undertaken to involve the staff of the United Nations system in the anniversary preparations and events. The secretariat had been in contact with all staff committees and had regularly briefed the Staff-Management Coordination Committee.

D. Activities of non-governmental organizations

30. The Preparatory Committee was informed that, in accordance with its decision to ensure the fullest participation of non-governmental organizations, there had been much contact and cooperation between the secretariat and numerous non-governmental organizations. They were actively involved in the planning process at all levels; collaboration extended to developing communication strategies as well as identifying particular commemorative projects.

31. The United Nations associations had been particularly active and supportive of global efforts to commemorate the anniversary, in many cases assisting in the establishment of national committees and spearheading anniversary preparations at national and local levels. The Vice-President of the World Federation of United Nations Associations addressed the Committee on two occasions, informing it of the myriad activities being undertaken by the United Nations associations and stressing the link that they provided between the Organization and the peoples it represented.

IV. FINANCING OF THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY

32. In 1993, the Preparatory Committee had been informed that the financial situation of the Organization precluded making funds available from the regular budget for financing fiftieth anniversary commemorative programmes and events. Thus, in September 1992, the Secretary-General established a Trust Fund for the Fiftieth Anniversary Celebrations for that purpose, and urged Member States to support that initiative. Support was also sought from the private sector, including a limited number of global sponsors and international licensees.

33. The Preparatory Committee was informed that during the past year substantial progress had been made in securing global and project sponsorships, as well as some additional generous individual contributions. Further resources for programmes would be received also as royalties from a limited number of items bearing the anniversary emblem, including coins and a commemorative watch. As noted in paragraph 21 above, programme development had also been significantly augmented with self-funded projects.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PREPARATORY COMMITTEE

34. The Preparatory Committee for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolutions:

DRAFT RESOLUTION I

Commemoration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations

The General Assembly,

Noting the suggestion of the Royal Mint of the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland regarding the creation of the United Nations fiftieth anniversary coin programme and its offer to manage that programme for the benefit of the Trust Fund for the Fiftieth Anniversary Celebrations and participating States,

Noting also the positive report of the secretariat of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations on the offer of the Royal Mint,

Noting further the potential of such a programme to provide the Trust Fund with revenue to support educational and communications activities about the work of the United Nations,

Agreeing that the issuance of legal-tender coins commemorating the fiftieth anniversary would be a fitting way for States to honour and provide a suitable lasting memento of this historic occasion,

1. Endorses the creation of a United Nations Fiftieth Anniversary Coin Programme and the offer of the Royal Mint of the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to manage that Programme;

2. Requests the secretariat of the fiftieth anniversary to make the necessary arrangements with the Royal Mint to implement the Coin Programme on a timely basis;

3. Requests the Secretary-General to write to all States advising them of the Programme and inviting them to participate by issuing a commemorative coin honouring the fiftieth anniversary.

DRAFT RESOLUTION II

Work of the Preparatory Committee for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations

The General Assembly,

Having considered the report of the Preparatory Committee for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations,

1. Approves the report of the Preparatory Committee and takes note of its work in 1994, including the progress of work reported in the open-ended drafting group of the Committee;

2. Looks forward to receiving, before the end of 1994, the report of the Secretary-General on the responses received in regard to the special commemorative meeting to be held in October 1995, in order to enable it to recommend a precise timetable and agenda for that meeting;

3. Expresses its appreciation to the secretariat of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations for its efforts to make this a global commemoration, involving, inter alia, national committees, non-governmental organizations and the United Nations system and staff;

4. Welcomes the commemorative programme being formulated by the secretariat, and requests that emphasis continue to be placed on the development of programmes addressing the general public, and in particular youth and children;

5. Welcomes also the continuation of the work of the Preparatory Committee on the draft declaration for the fiftieth anniversary;

6. Decides that the Preparatory Committee should continue its work and report thereon to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session, and/or during the forty-ninth session, as required.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 48 (A/47/48).

2/ Ibid., Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 48 (A/48/48).

3/ Ibid., Addendum (A/48/48/Add.1).